

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Postal programs aid mail headaches

A La Crosse, Wis., company with the apt name of PostalSoft Inc. has come up with two programs that save postage costs on bulk mailings.

The programs, PostWare and PostWare Jr., list from \$69 to more than \$1,000, depending on which modules and options are ordered.

Similar, but more expensive, programs have been available for years on large mainframe computers. However, the programs from PostalSoft share the distinction of being low cost and able to run on ordinary IBM PCs and PC-compatible computers.

As company mail clerks know, sorting and bundling bulk mail is no small task. For example, to take advantage of the low postage rates available for third-class mail, a great deal of prior preparation is necessary. Even if all the mail is provided to the mail clerk in zip

code order — as is usually the case when mailing labels are prepared by most companies — the clerk must still separate the pieces in bundles of 10 or more to the same zip code, 10 or more to the same first three digits of the zip code, and 10 or more to the same state.

In addition, each bundle must have a colored "D," "3," or "S" sticker, respectively, and be banded with two rubber bands.

Finally, depending on the number of bundles of each type, separate mail bags with special tags need to be prepared. This is such a complicated task that some companies even subcontract the work to mail houses rather than bother with it themselves.

Is all the trouble worth it? You bet. For a normal letter-size 1-ounce envelope, the first class rate is 22 cents. A 2-ounce letter costs 37 cents, 3-ounce costs 54 cents, and

4-ounce costs 71 cents. But you can send up to 3.5 ounces by third class for only 12.5 cents each. That's a whopping savings of almost 50 cents an envelope on 3.5-ounce mailings. And it gets better the more pieces you mail and the more often you mail.

The hard part is the labor-intensive activity to prepare mailings to the U.S. Postal Service's exact specifications. The Postal Service is very picky, and all your work might go down the drain if the bundles and sacks are not prepared just so.

That's where programs such as PostWare and PostWare Jr. come in. Here are some of the things they do:

- ✓ Sort your data base file containing the mailing label data into the proper order for bundling.

- ✓ Put codes on each label indicating where new bundles begin and which colored stickers need to be attached.

- ✓ Put additional codes on each label, eliminating the need for colored stickers. This is done by print-

ing an "endorsement" line of text on top of each label that the post office accepts instead of a sticker.

- ✓ Print sack labels corresponding to the number of bundles required for each sack. This, in turn, determines what post office distribution facility the bag is directed to. The tag must be worded according to a complicated set of rules that perhaps only a computer can understand.

- ✓ Print management reports that help your clerk properly fill out the various forms required by the post office, and help you analyze the savings your company will incur by going through the process.

Are there any disadvantages of PostWare and PostWare Jr.? Yes, they're both complicated to set up and use, which I'll detail in next week's column.

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